ESP STUDENTS' SELF-EVALUATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

The article aims at examining students' needs for using the mother tongue in learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and analyzing their self-evaluations of translating from the L1 into L2 and vice versa. With English becoming rather a second than foreign language in Lithuanian higher education, it was considered important to carry on the research on the learners' perspective and attitude towards the necessity and scope of the mother tongue in studying ESP.

The respondents are the students of four specializations, psychology (PS), social work (SW), sociocultural education (SCE) and internet management and communication (IMC), who study professional language at university level. The obtained results are processed statistically by a means of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented in charts. The findings demonstrate that all learners need some usage of the native language in ESP classes, but the amount of translation depends on students' proficiency and specialization. The research findings also point to the students' expressed need to develop skills in translating from their native language into English in ESP university courses.

Key words: ESP teaching/learning, translation, students' self-evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

The current prevalent teaching of languages is based on the communicative method which favors teaching only in a target language, e.g. English through English (Willis, 1981). The idea of abandoning the native language, however, is too stressful to many learners who need a sense of security in the experience of learning a foreign language. In the past, the prevalence of grammar-translation method led to the extraordinary phenomenon: students were unable to speak fluently after having studied the language for a long time. For this reason, translation was defined as uncommunicative, boring, pointless, difficult and irrelevant (Duff, 1994).

A revival of interest towards using some mother tongue in the English classroom is caused by the necessity to improve language accuracy, fluency and flexibility. It is necessary to mention that learners' mother tongue in L2 classes was not approved of because of linguistic transfer or interference, such as under- or over-production and misinterpretation. However, our research and experience in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) convinces that translation is needed for precise usage of the language in communicating with and passing on the information to fellow colleagues, i.e. mother tongue is needed to some extent for precision in activating ESP vocabulary. Another reason is that translation is a natural thing to do in language learning, and code-switching between languages is regarded as a natural phenomenon in language acquisition. Moreover, translation can serve as a tool for improving language skills.

1.1. Review of relevant literature

It is necessary to distinguish between the teaching of translation as a vocational skill and the use of translation in the teaching situation as an aid to language learning. The need for some translation in language teaching / learning is usually supported by the non-native teachers. Native teachers of English argue that foreign language learning needs as much exposure to the L2 as possible during classroom time, and any usage of the mother tongue or translation is a waste of time. However, translation has been an important part of English language teaching for a long time, but it has been abandoned since communicative methodologies became dominant. Interestingly, although translation was out of favor with English language practitioners, „it has rather stubbornly refused to die in the teaching of languages other than English" (Cook, 2010). It was claimed that a present interest in using a mother tongue for learning English was due to the necessity to improve language accuracy and fluency (Ross, 2000). In other words, the use of mother tongue and translation can serve as a tool for improving language skills.

Some practitioners believed that students' first language should not be allowed in a second language classroom due to the L1 interference. In the past, a learners' mother tongue was rejected because of linguistic transfer of structures and vocabulary from the native language (Kroll, 1994). There appears a widespread assumption that language transfer is an important characteristic of second language acquisition and this deficiency may be developmental. Cross-linguistic similarities and differences between the L1 and the L2 can produce positive transfer or negative transfer such as underproduction, overproduction, production errors, and misinterpretation (Odlin, 1996). Both negative and positive transfer between the L1 and the L2 is important for development of the complex system of the learners' second language. Translation is a natural thing to do in language learning, and code-switching between languages is regarded as natural development in learning another language.

A. Bonyadi (2003) claims that it is inevitable for language learners to use their native language L1 as a resource; they need to be able to relate lexis and structures of target language into their equivalents in their mother tongue; moreover, translation makes the students develop their reading comprehension ability as it is a conscious process of learning.

Regarding the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom, it is important to find out how students themselves feel about it. Schweers (1999), in a report of the outcomes of his research on the use of the mother tongue in English classes, concludes that a second language can be learned through raising awareness to the similarities and differences between the L1 and L2.

His research into the issue of the L1 use in the L2 classes shows that 89% of the participants felt that mother tongue had to be used in their English classes. S. Deller (2003) supports the same ideas by stating that the mother tongue is not only a resource to notice differences and similarities between the two languages, but also it lets learners 1) develop and produce their own materials, including their own tests; 2) encourage spontaneity and fluency; 3) have a beneficial effect on group dynamics and receive ongoing and meaningful feedback from learners.

In our earlier article, we emphasized the necessity of translation as the fifth skill in teaching ESP (Author et al., 2002). The study of grammar-translation method aiming to achieve a communicative goal and to improve learners' performance confirms the idea (Kim, 2011). Recent studies into use of the L1 in the ESP classes (Xhemaili, 2013) report that 75 of 150 participants believe that the L1 must be used in English classrooms, and about 67% of students feel it can be used in translating the unknown and difficult words.

Major objections to using translation in language teaching were summarized as follows (Kaye, 2009). First, translation does not help students develop communication skills. Second, it encourages them to use the L1 instead of the L2. Third, translation activities may be suitable for students who prefer analytical or verbal-linguistic learning strategies. Finally, translation is a difficult skill, which is not always rewarding. On the other hand,the benefits of translation activities include practice of all language skills, i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening. In terms of communicative competence, it helps to master accuracy, clarity and flexibility.It is well known that translation is a real-life, natural activity which many learners use on a daily basis either formally or informally. Translation is a usual strategy used by many learners even if teachers do not encourage it. Discussion of differences and similarities between languages help students understand problems caused by the interference of their native language. Therefore, developing skills in translation is a natural and logical part of improving language proficiency (Kaye, 2009).

Translation is often referred to as the fifth language skill alongside the other four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It holds a special importance at an intermediate and advanced level: translations from the L1 to the L2 and from the L2 to the L1 are recognized as the most important social skills since they promote communication and understanding between strangers (Ross, 2000). If students are aware of the differences between languages, language transfer and intervention from their own language are likely to be reduced.

There is an opinion that eliminating or limiting the native language does not guarantee better acquisition (Mattioli, 2004). Translation as a teaching tool needs to take into account grammar, syntax and other aspects of language. However good the students are at understanding authentic materials, some of them keep mentally translating from L2 into L1 and vice versa. This fact makes teachers of English consider the importance of translation for learning purposes. The findings by Author et al. (2007) confirmed this idea. Moreover, some practitioners think that it is highly probable that L2 learners will always think most often in their L1, even at the advanced level (Mahmoud, 2006).

According to B. Naimushin (2002),"translation is culminated with the moment when learners realize there will always be words and expressions they do not know but this cannot be an obstacle to successful communication, and that translation is not about word-by-word rendering of the original message in the target language but is communication-oriented, and with the equivalence of the entire message supreme to the equivalence of its segments".

G. Cook (2010)claims that for most contemporary language learners, translation should be a major aim and means of language learning, and a major measure of success.The aims of the modern language learner have shifted from the old monolingual and teacher-stated aims to bring learners as close as possible to native competence, to new aims which involve a constant awareness of how languages interact, cross over and complement each other.According to G. Cook,'translation has been (grudgingly) accepted as a useful tool for decades, even if it went against recent theories of language learning; translation is inevitable. People are L1-based creatures, but this is also a potential bridge to L2, 3 or 4, and translation can be stimulating, fun and enriching'.

The debate over the use of L1 in foreign language teaching has not been settled yet. On the one hand, there are teachers who reject the use of L1 or fail to recognize any significant potential in it. On the other hand, there are those who massively overuse it. It is important to use the L2 as the language of instruction when possible and switching to the mother tongue when it is really necessary. Whatever the teachers' attitudes to the L1 appropriateness in English classes are, they must take into consideration the needs of their clientele, i.e. the learners of the L2.

This paper aims at examining perceptions of Generation Y (Reilly, 2012) on the use of translation in ESP classes in various linguistic situations. These students were born into a world of the Information Technology, they prefer to multitask and are technologically advanced, and they think and behave differently from the members of previous generations. The perceptions of the present respondents are compared with the attitudes of previous streams of learners in 2002 and 2007.

2. RESPONDENTS AND METHODS

The respondents in this research were the students of different 1st cycle study programmes in Social Sciences at Mykolas Romeris University and studying English for Specific Purposes. There were 5 samples of respondents in accordance with the number of specializations.There were 135 respondents: 45 students (4 sub-groups) of Psychology (PS, in 2012), 22 students (2 sub-groups) of Social Work (SW, in 2012), 13 students (1 group) of Sociocultural Education (SCE, in 2013), 25 students (1 group) of Internet Management and Communication (IMC, in 2013), and 30 students (2 sub-groups) of Law and Customs Activities (LCA, in 2014). Their level of English proficiency was assessed by administering the Oxford Placement Test: students of PS and IMC were intermediate, and students of SW, SCE and LCA were pre-intermediate. The amount of time in L2 environment was 4 contact hours per week for 1 semester, which amounted to 64 contact hours of English instruction.

The design of the questionnaire conforms to the accepted standards (Dőrnyei, 2003). In this research, the same questionnaire was administered as in (Author et al., 2007).The responses were rated on a 5-point Likert's scale from 1 to 5: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the findings of the survey and analyzes the key points that emerged. For the sake of clarity in visual displays of the data, the positive responses (4 and 5) and negative responses (1 and 2) are added up. The frequencies of positive responses in percentage versus class activities are shown in Chart 1. The 1stcylinders represent the responses by the students of Psychology (PS), the 2ndcylinders – by the students of Social Work (SW), the 3rdcylinders – by

students of Sociocultural Education (SCE), the 4thcylinders - by students of Internet Management and Communication (IMC), and the 5th cylinders – by the students of Law and Customs Activities (LCA).

The relevant statements of the questionnaire are reproduced below:

1) In English classes, I occasionally prefer to use my mother tongue. 1 – strongly disagree,2 – disagree, 3 – not sure, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree.

2) In writing activities, I often mentally translate ideas from my mother tongue into English. 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 –not sure, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree.

3) While reading professional texts I use a bilingual dictionary to translate unknown words. 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – not sure, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

4) It is easier for me to translate ESP terms from English than into English. 1 –strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 –not sure, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree.

5) In listening activities, I mentally translate what I hear. 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 –not sure, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree.

6) In speaking activities, I mentally translate what I want to say. 1 – strongly disagree,2 – disagree, 3 – not sure, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree.

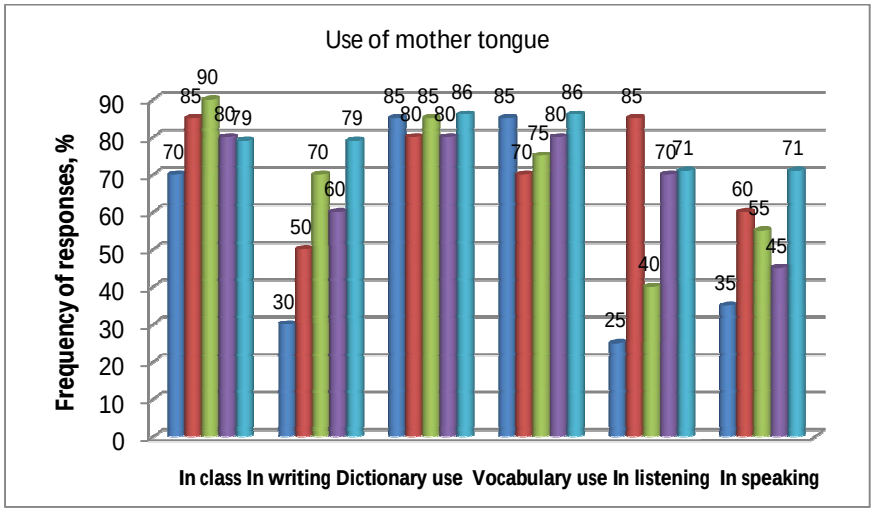

Chart 1. *The positive responses on the use of the mother tongue in different class activities by the students of 5 different specializations*

The 1stcylinders - students of Psychology (in 2012), the 2ndcylinders –students of Social Work (in 2012), the 3rd cylinders –students of Sociocultural Education (in 2013), the 4th cylinders –students of Internet Management and Communication (in 2013), and the 5th cylinders – students of Law and Customs Activities (2014).

Chart 1 clearly demonstrates that the need in mother tongue depends on the specialization and the classroom activities. It is obvious that there is a spectacular need in: 1) class activities (between 70% and 90%); 2) use of a bilingual dictionary (between 80% and 86%); 3) use of ESP vocabulary (between 70% and 86%). In writing and listening activity, PS students rely less on their native language (between 35% and 25%, respectively). As far as speaking activity is concerned,35% and 45% of PS and IMC students, respectively, need translation, while SW, SCE and LCA cannot do without it: 60%, 55% and 71%, respectively, formulate their ideas by mentally translating. Moreover, all students of these three specializations emphasized the need for translating terminology by writing remarks in the margins of their survey sheets.

The obtained results were processed statistically by a means of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). First, the reliability of collected data was evaluated by computing Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. According to Dőrnyei (2003), results are reliable if the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is at least 0.60. Here the values of Cronbach's Alpha coefficients have been equal to 0.91 for the responses of PS students, 0.87 for the responses of SW students, 0.82 for the responses of SCE group, 0.84 for the responses of IMC students, and 0.86 for LCA students, respectively, which proves that obtained data are reliable.

The Means and Standard Deviations, for example, for speaking activities, are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. The Means and Standard Deviations for speaking activities of each specialization.

Specialization	Means	Standard Deviations
PS 1st sub-group	3.18	0.60
PS 2nd sub-group	3.38	0.92
PS 3rd sub-group	3.28	0.40
PS 4th sub-group	2.82	0.75
SW 1st sub-group	2.09	0.94
SW 2nd sub-group	2.18	1.25
SCE 1 group	2.91	0.94
IMC 1 group	3.25	0.89
LCA 1st sub-group	2.85	0.85
LCA 2nd sub-group	2.58	0.95

In the settings, when the number of samples exceeds two, and in the current research, the responses of students of 5 specializations were analyzed, it is necessary to compute One-Way ANOVA in order to find out if there is the statistically significant difference between the Means.

The comparison of the Means by One-Way ANOVA includes the following computations: 1) The Mean for each of the sample (known as the Group Mean); 2) The Mean for all samples combined (known as the Overall Mean); 3) The total deviation of each score from the Group Mean (known as Within Group Variation and denoted MS_W); 4) The deviation of each Group Mean from the Overall Mean (known as Between Group Variationand denoted MS_B); and finally, ANOVA produces 5) The F value which is the ratio Between Group Variation to the Within Group Variation, i.e. $F = MS_B/MS_W$. If the difference between the Means is due to chance, i.e. there are no real differences between the Means, the expected value of F-ratio would be one (1.00).

Computed F ratios for the responses in Chart 1 are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. One-way ANOVA computations for the responses (Chart 1) on using the L1 by the respondents of 5 specializations

Class activity	Mean Squares	$F= MS_B/MS_W$	Sig. level	Probability, %
In class	Between groups 1129.17 Within groups 75.00	15.06	0.063	93.7%
In writing	Between groups 673.61 Within groups 58.33	11.55	0.081	91.9%
Bilingual dictionary	Between groups 631.25 Within groups 1012.50	0.62	0.726	27.4%
In vocabulary	Between groups 187.50 Within groups 50.00	3.75	0.367	63.3%
In listening	Between groups 221.88 Within groups 1250.00	0.18	0.923	7.7%
In speaking	Between groups 521.87 Within groups 50.00	10.44	0.23	77%

Computed F ratio for the responses of 5 samples shown in Chart 1 vary between 0.18 and 15.06 (column 3). As F values are not equal to1.00, it implies that there are real differences between the Means. However, statistical significance of the findings depends on the value of Sig. The lowest value of significance level Sig. is 0.063 and the highest value is 0.923 (column 4 in Table 2), i.e. the probabilities are 93.7% and 7.7%, respectively. The acceptable values of Sig. level for F ratio must be either 0.01 (probability 99%) or 0.05 (probability 95%). Therefore, the obtained values of Sig. level are too large, which implies that the responses between the samples are not statistically significant.

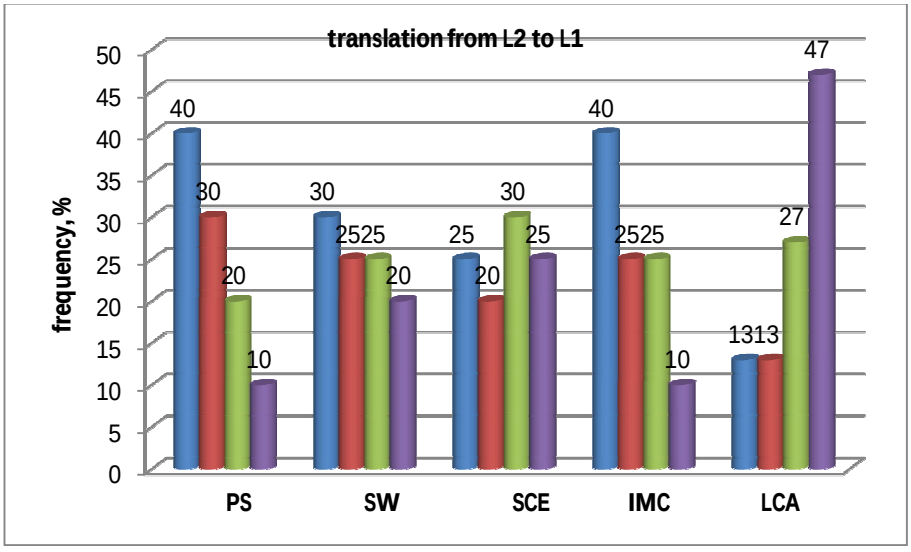

Chart 2.*Self-evaluation of translation from the L2 into the L1 abilities by the students of 5 different specializations.*

The 1st cylinders show the percentage of excellent grades, the 2nd cylinders – very good, the 3rd cylinders – good, and the 4th cylinders – weak.

Chart 2 and Chart 3 display the results of students' self-evaluation of their translation skills. The frequencies of self-evaluation grades are grouped by the 5 specializations: Psychology (PS), Social Work (SW), Sociocultural Education (SCE), Internet Management and Communication (IMC), and Law and Customs Activities (LCA). Each group contains four cylinders: the 1st shows "excellent" grade, the 2nd – "very good", the 3rd – "good", and the 4th – "weak". Chart 2 shows that translation from English into the L1 does not present many difficulties: 90% of PS (40%+ 30%+20%) and IMC (40%=25%+25%) students award themselves grades from excellent to good, and only 10% are weak at it. Majority (80%) of SW students estimate their translation ability between excellent and good, with only 20% being weak. Similarly, 75% of SCE are good at it and 25% are weak.Over a half (53%) of LCA students award themselves good grades with 47% feeling weak at translation activities.

However, as Chart 3 shows, translations from the mother tongue L1 into English are rather difficult, and the statistics depends on specialization.Majority of PS students, i.e. 80% (20% excellent +30% very good +30% good), award themselves good grades. Just fewer, namely 70% of IMC students manage to perform quite well. However, only 40% (10% excellent+10% very good+20% good) of SW students think their translation abilities are good. Moreover, only 30% (5% excellent +5% very good +20% good) of SCE students expect to be able to translate well. Thus, students of SW, SCE and LCA admit being weak at translating from L1 into L2: 60%, 70% and 47%, respectively.

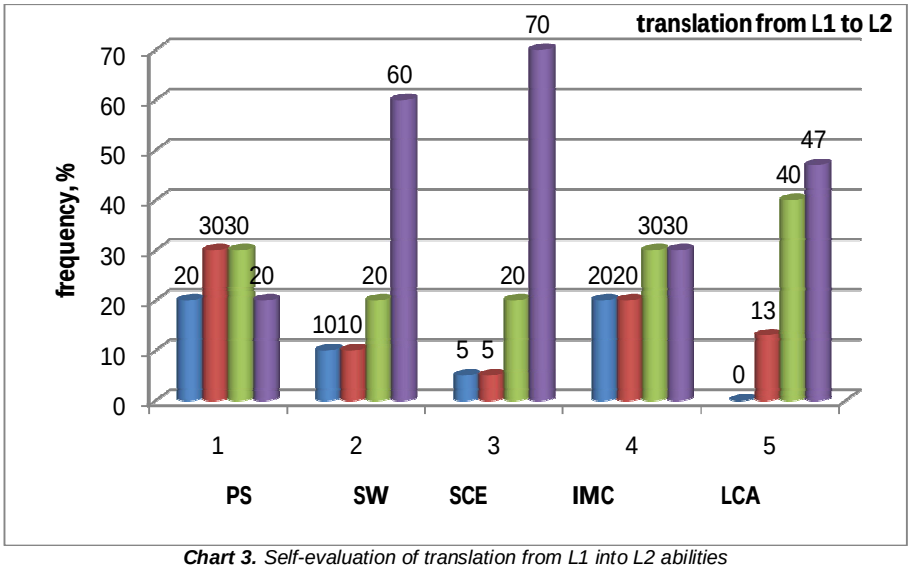

Chart 3. *Self-evaluation of translation from L1 into L2 abilities by students of 5 different specializations*

The 1st cylinders show the percentage of excellent grades, the 2nd cylinders – very good, the 3rd cylinders – good, and the 4th cylinders – weak.

The findings in Chart 2 and Chart 3 were treated using the SPSS software to find out if there were any correlations between the specializations and if the results were statistically significant. It appeared that, although computed F ratios for 5 samples in Chart 2 and Chart 3 were 10.4 and 11.5, respectively, i.e. exceeded the critical F values, but their significance levels were 0.23 (probability 77%) and 0.08 (probability 92%), respectively. It implies that,in spite of the differences, the responses between the samples in both Charts are not statistically significant.

It is not surprising that there are no significant statistical differences for these findings. Ability to translate depends on learner's intelligence, aptitude, self-esteem, self-confidence and general proficiency in English, which are parts of learner's personality. It is suggested that the future studies of L2 acquisition lie in the integration of linguistic and psychological approaches and the study of learner individual differences needs to identify various aptitude complexes and contextualized nature of L2 learning (Dőrnyei, 2005).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions have been drawn. First, the current respondents, similarly as previous streams of learners (Authors, 2002; Author et al., 2007), rather strongly rely on their mother tongue in learning English for Specific Purposes.

Second, the amount of the native language that students need depends on their proficiency in General English, chosen specialization and linguistic activities.

Third, the processing of the responses on the use of mother tongue by a means of SPSS software showed that the data by five different specializations are not statistically significant.

Fourth, the respondents' self-evaluation results of translation abilities are not statistically significant, i.e. they are also due to chance.

Finally, respondents are realistic about their abilities to translate professional materials: students are more capable of translating from the L2 into the L1 than from the L1 into the L2, which is consistent with the data obtained in the previous research.

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